

**Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**January 11, 2005**

A meeting of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) was held on Tuesday, January 11, 2005, at the offices of the American Legion Department of Virginia, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue, Richmond, Virginia.

**Members Present**

Jim Aucoin, *American Veterans*; John Bonnell, *Marine Corps League*; George Dumas, *Homeless and Disabled Veterans*; David Ellis, *NAUS*; Paul Fink, *U. S. Navy Cruiser Sailors Association*; Robert Gray, *American Ex-Prisoners of War*; Pat Green, *Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*; Michael Hulsey, *Reserve Officers Association of the U.S.*; John Jackson, *Paralyzed Veterans of America*; Norman Jasper, *Military Order of the Purple Heart*; James Jones, *Korean War Veterans Association*; Jon Mangis, *Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services*; Daniel Miller, *Disabled American Veterans*; Connie O'Neill, *American Legion*; Richard Rinaldo, *Legion of Valor of the U. S., Inc.*; R. Goodwin Sacra, *Navy Seabee Veterans of America*; and Peter Snelling, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*.

**Members Absent**

John Anderson, *Chairman, Board of Veterans Services*; Mason Botts, *Air Force Association*; John Dunleavy, *Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge*; Richard Schneider, *Non-Commissioned Officers Association*; Ronald Shamblin, *Virginia National Guard Association*; Thomas Snee, *Fleet Reserve Association*; and Frank Wickersham, *MOAA*. Mr. Wickersham was absent because he is serving in Kuwait and Iraq as a Department of Defense support contractor on an urgent armoring project for fuel tankers, as assignment which is expected to last until Spring 2005.

**Others Present**

C. L. "Bert" Boyd, Chief Deputy Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Steven Combs, Assistant to the Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Rhonda Earman, Administrative Supervisor, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Don Ferguson, Assistant Attorney General; Brenda Hayes; Robert Hayes; John McAnaw, VFW; Anne McKinney, Paralyzed Veterans of America.

**Materials Distributed**

Meeting Agenda; draft Minutes of the September 7, 2004 and the December 7, 2004 meetings; JLC 2005 Legislative Agenda; Current JLC Constitution and Bylaws, Proposed JLC Constitution and Bylaws, and Summary of Changes to JLC Constitution and Bylaws; Proposed JLC Mission and Vision Statements; January 6, 2005, letter from Commissioner Mangis to Interested Veteran Advocates; December 17, 2004, letter from Board of Veterans Services Chairman John Anderson to Governor Warner; Governor Warner's 2004-2006 budget amendment proposal for Department of Veterans Services; Department of Planning and Budget document – "2005 Findings and Recommendations of Department of Veterans Services Study Group;" USDVA Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures for FY 2003; Resolutions of the Military Order of the Purple Heart relating to Commissary and Exchange Privileges for Purple Heart Recipients,

et. al., Free Tuition for Purple Heart Recipients, Korean War Memorial at Hampton Roads, and Illinois Military Family Relief Fund

### **Call to Order**

With 13 of 22 members present, Chairman O'Neill called the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m. Messrs. Ellis, Fink and Rinaldo arrived after the meeting began. Mr. O'Neill welcomed guests, John McAnaw of the VFW, Anne McKinney of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and veterans advocates, Brenda and Robert Hayes.

### **Approval of Minutes**

A **motion** was made, seconded, and passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the September 7, 2004 meeting with the following changes:

#### **Page 1 – Members Present**

Thomas Snee was not present at the meeting and, therefore, his name should be deleted from this section.

Steven Combs' name should be deleted from this section.

Jim Walker's name should be deleted from this section.

#### **Page 1 – Others Present**

Jim Walker's name should be added to this section.

A **motion** was made, seconded, and passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the December 7, 2004, meeting, as drafted.

### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman O'Neill began his comments by saying there had been significant progress in the DVS budget picture that will give greater importance to the state's veterans programs and services. Chairman O'Neill said that the most important item on the JLC Legislative Agenda, Number 1 relating to increased funding for DVS, has been partially addressed in the Governor's proposed budget amendments. Chairman O'Neill emphasized the importance of the JLC achieving a quorum at meetings so that the Council may continue to be a viable force in advocating for veterans in the Commonwealth.

### **Report of the Constitution and By-Laws Review Committee**

Copies of the current JLC Constitution and By-Laws and the proposed versions of both documents were distributed to all members present. Members were advised that the proposed changes to the Constitution and By-Laws would be discussed at the next meeting, and, if approved, adopted. It was suggested that DVS staff send copies of the proposed Constitution and Bylaws to Council members who were absent from the meeting.

Dan Miller made a **motion** that the number constituting a quorum at meetings be reduced, and that Article IV.1.e of the Constitution be revised accordingly. Discussion followed and a

question was raised about the legality of such a change. Don Ferguson advised that the current quorum requirement is set out in Va. Code § 2.2-2681, and that any changes to it would need to come in the form of an amendment to that statute. Further discussion followed, and it was agreed that the Council should ask the General Assembly to amend the Code of Virginia such that seven (7) voting members would constitute a quorum at JLC meetings. The amended motion was seconded and passed, with Peter Snelling dissenting.

### **Report of the Mission and Vision Statement Committee**

Richard Rinaldo presented the proposed Mission and Vision Statements to the Council for consideration. George Dumas raised the concern that some of the items in the statements might be too ambitious and cautioned that it would be best not to include things the Council does not have the resources to accomplish. It was emphasized that the JLC is a portal to the member VSOs, which have the capacity to accomplish large-scale objectives. Mr. Jasper then noted that the Military Order of the Purple Heart recently had passed several resolutions at the national level that were prompted by Commissioner Mangis. A **motion** was made to adopt the proposed Mission and Vision Statements, as drafted. The motion was seconded and passed, with Dr. Dumas dissenting.

### **Commissioner's Update**

Commissioner Mangis began his report by thanking the Council for a good turnout for the meeting and welcomed the guests in attendance.

Commissioner Mangis advised the Council that the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) had conducted a study of the immediate fiscal needs of DVS and presented its findings to the Board of Veterans Services on December 13. While no new positions were recommended by DPB, the recommendation was to “fully fund” the agency and fill all currently authorized positions. This recommendation is reflected in Governor Warner’s budget amendment proposal for the agency. Commissioner Mangis outlined the positions that would be filled if this measure is passed by the General Assembly, including hiring 5 veterans service representatives to fill vacant positions, and the conversion of 2 part-time veterans service representative positions to full-time status. Commissioner Mangis added that the DPB study also recommended funding to develop a much-needed training manual for veterans service representatives.

Commissioner Mangis said Board Chairman John Anderson sent a letter to the Governor in December thanking him for his recommendation to fully fund all positions, and asking that the Commonwealth provide a level of additional funding such that the per capita number of Veterans Service Representatives in the Commonwealth meet the median of the number of such representatives in surrounding states like North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, etc. Dr. Anderson’s letter also requested additional funding to support the conversion of the part-time administrative assistant position at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia to full-time status.

Commissioner Mangis said that Dr. Anderson has appointed an ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee to examine the needs and objectives for DVS and make recommendations for the 2006-2008 biennial budget. Commissioner Mangis noted that demographics, such as age, disabilities, geographic location, etc., that provide a picture of the specific needs of various

veterans populations will be considered in the budget planning. Needs specific to field offices, itinerate service locations, technology, etc., also will be considered. Commissioner Mangis noted that the Board will seek the JLC's input into the strategic planning process and emphasized the importance of the VSOs in advocating in support of the DVS 2006-2008 budget proposal once it has been developed.

Commissioner Mangis also informed the Council that two of the five legislative members who sit on the Board, Delegates Cox and Watts, intend to sponsor budget amendments during the 2005 General Assembly session that would augment the Governor's budget proposal for more service officers and provide a mechanism that would guarantee the state's share of funding to add the 80 domiciliary beds that have been cut from the Sitter-Barfoot Care Center. Commissioner Mangis said this measure would not impede the care center's construction, which is expected to begin in March 2005.

Commissioner Mangis emphasized that in addition to the VSOs advocating in support of the Governor's budget proposal at the organizational level, it is vitally important that Council members contact their own legislators individually, by writing letters, sending e-mails and telephoning their offices.

Commissioner Mangis provided the information about the Virginia War Memorial that was requested at the last meeting. Prior to 2003, there were approximately 10,000 – 12,000 visitors to the Memorial, annually. In 2003 and 2004, that number jumped to approximately 18,000. In 2005, the number is expected to reach approximately 30,000, due in large part to the "Virginians at War" exhibits and educational program.

Commissioner Mangis also addressed the proposal for Veterans Preference in employment and other areas. He said that Virginia, like most states, has moved away from a test or a "scored" employment applications, a mechanism that typically is used to determine factors like veterans status. Commissioner Mangis said he is still working on this initiative and will be getting in touch with Dan Miller later to discuss it further.

Commissioner Mangis informed the Council of a letter he had received from a retired Merchant Marine expressing his dissatisfaction that the Merchant Marine shield was not displayed at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk. In a letter sent to the veteran, Commissioner Mangis explained that approximately 30 organizations had received active military status during World War II, a number too great to recognize at the cemetery. Commissioner Mangis advised the veteran that the decision was made to recognize only the five uniformed services and assured him that no slight to any of the other organizations, including the Merchant Marines, was intended. A suggestion was made to recognize some of these organizations by naming cemetery streets after them.

Mr. Snelling raised concerns about the Commonwealth's current organizational structure as it relates to the Department of Veterans Services, namely that the Commissioner must report through the Secretary of Administration to the Governor. He said he believes this arrangement is creating a barrier to moving veterans' initiatives through the state system. Commissioner Mangis responded that, technically, he reports to the Governor, but that for administrative

purposes, DVS falls under the guidance of the Secretary of Administration. Commissioner Mangis said that thus far, this arrangement has been useful in obtaining assistance from agencies such as the Department of General Services (DGS) that also report to the Secretary of Administration. For example, DGS project management and engineering staff worked very hard, and provided an enormous amount of technical expertise, in the construction of the Horton Cemetery and getting the Sitter-Barfoot Care Center project up and running.

Dr. Dumas requested that Commissioner Mangis spend a few minutes responding to Mrs. Hayes' concerns about the level of services to veterans, and Commissioner Mangis responded to Mrs. Haye's concerns.

### **Old Business**

Chairman O'Neill informed the Council that the JLC 2005 Legislative Agenda had been presented to the Board of Veterans Services on December 13. Mr. O'Neill encouraged the JLC member-VSOs to support the agenda at the organizational level when advocating for veterans programs with state legislators. He added that he will add the proposed quorum requirement reduction as an item on the Agenda. Mr. Green informed the Council that the donation of a building site in Dublin for the proposed veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia is being negotiated and has received tentative approval. Mr. Green urged JLC members to ask their VSOs to support the proposal to construct a veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia.

Mr. Miller informed the Council that a JLC resolution for a "Hire Vets First Month" has been developed and will be submitted to the Governor for his consideration and approval. The resolution is being sought in conjunction with the federal Hire Vets First initiative.

A question was raised as to how JLC could be instrumental in raising private funds for veterans programs, and Commissioner Mangis said that was the primary purpose of the Veterans Service Foundation. Chairman O'Neill said the JLC could assist with this process by exploring private donation opportunities and bringing the ideas back to the Council. Mr. Green asked that DVS staff send him information on the Foundation and a list of its Board of Trustees.

A question was raised as to the status of the Roanoke Care Center Citizens Advisory Committee. Before the issue could be discussed, Mr. Jasper pointed out that the Care Center's Community Relations Committee (CRC) had met recently and discussed the issues of ambulance charges, the canteen project, and electronic beds. It is the position of the CRC that the amount the vendor providing ambulance service from the Salem VA Medical Center to the VVCC is excessive, and this matter is being investigated further. The canteen project has not yet taken off, because there is not sufficient volunteer staff to support it. Mr. Jasper asked Council members to go back to their VSOs and request volunteers to support the staffing of this project. The CRC also would like for all beds at the VVCC to be electric and is seeking the support for this project from the VSOs. Mr. Green agreed to bring this matter up with the Roanoke Valley Veterans Council. Mr. Jasper also noted that all of the VVCC renovations should be completed in the next few months.

Mr. Jones suggested that because the VA hospitals have the largest concentration of veterans, that benefits offices should be located in them. Mr. Mangis said there is no money in the current year's budget to support this, but he will consider this suggestion in the next biennial budget process. It was noted that the VA medical centers will furnish office space and telephone service free of charge for DVS benefits offices.

### **Public Comments**

Brenda Hayes spoke in support of Virginia's veterans and said she is embarrassed that veterans in the Commonwealth do not have as many benefits as those living in other states, and that there are not enough service officers to meet the demand. Ms. Hayes also said there is not enough communication between DVS and Virginia's veterans about what services and programs are available to them. Mrs. Hayes also noted that access to the Richmond field office is limited because of physical barriers to the disabled and lack of adequate parking. Ms. Hayes also suggested that information on veterans cemeteries be provided to veterans' spouses and family members for estate planning purposes.

Commissioner Mangis responded that DVS has developed an electronic veterans newsletter that is distributed to VSOs and posted on the DVS web site. Mr. Mangis said that if and when funding to support the expense can be obtained, a hard copy of the newsletter will be mailed to these groups. Commissioner Mangis said that DVS also holds Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits across the state throughout the year, which are designed to reach veterans in more remote, rural areas of the state. Commissioner Mangis emphasized that, when comparing veterans benefits of different states, it is important not to compare "apples to oranges." While some states spend more total dollars than Virginia, it should be remembered that many have more programs and facilities like care centers, cemeteries, etc., than does Virginia. In addition, every state's organizational structure is different – some contract with private vendors and VSOs for benefits support.

A **motion** was made, seconded and passed unanimously to establish and ad hoc committee to examine Virginia's veterans benefits as compared to other states, and Mr. Rinaldo agreed to chair the group, which will be called the "Sub-committee on States' Benefits."

Anne McKinney echoed Mrs. Hayes' comments and emphasized how important it is for VSOs to advocate at the state and national level to help veterans get the benefits and services they deserve. Ms. McKinney stressed the significance of contacting legislators like Delegates Cox and Watts, who are championing measures like the budget amendment for the Sitter-Barfoot Care Center, and praised the Board of Veterans Services for establishing the Strategic Planning Sub-Committee.

John McAnaw of the VFW spoke in support of the urgent need for more veterans service officers, as well as other items on the VFW's list of priorities, including adding the 80 domiciliary beds that have been cut from the Sitter-Barfoot Care Center; and round-the-clock security for the Virginia War Memorial, so that the more valuable exhibits may be displayed. Mr. McAnaw cited statistics to demonstrate the need for more veterans service officers, especially in remote areas of the state. Mr. McAnaw noted the disparity between the amount of

VA compensation flowing into the state and the number of service officers needed to serve the more than 755,000 veterans in Virginia. Mr. McAnaw emphasized that revenue generated from VA compensation finds its way into the Virginia economy. Mr. McAnaw said that it is the recommendation of the VFW that DVS add at least 9 new veterans service representative positions, and 5 new administrative support positions.

#### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the JLC was scheduled for February 23, 2005, at 11:00 a.m., at the American Legion Department of Virginia, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue in Richmond. Mr. Bonnell made a **motion** to change the Bylaws to establish that all JLC meetings be held in Richmond because of its central location. The motion was seconded, but defeated by a vote of 5 in favor, and 7 against.

Mr. Green suggested sending JLC meeting notices to media outlets across the state as Public Service Announcements.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously that the JLC officially recognize the American Legion Department of Virginia for its hospitality and use of its facilities for JLC meetings.

#### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.